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Coach Bob Hurley Sr.: A Jesuit Educated Heroic Leader

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine if Coach Bob Hurley Sr. (Coach Hurley) was a Heroic Leader. Coach Hurley was the long time Varsity Boys Basketball Coach at St. Anthony's High School in Jersey City, New Jersey, which closed in 2017. Coach Hurley was also inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame in 2010. The methods of this research included a historical study of the life and career of Coach Hurley as was captured within the traditional media and academic literature. In addition, this research included one-on-one phone interviews that Francis Petit conducted with Coach Hurley in July 2020. Upon the completion of this qualitative research key takeaways were then applied and measured against the Four Pillars of Success as presented in *Heroic Leadership*. The conclusions of this study indicated that Coach Hurley was a Heroic Leader and successfully integrated the Four Pillars of Success which include Self-Awareness, Ingenuity, Love and Heroism.

Introduction

In 2019, corporations in the United States spent over \$83 billion on corporate training.¹ This expenditure has progressively increased over the past thirty years.² Large corporations (10,000 plus employees) averaged \$17.7 million on training per year while midsize (100-999 employees) and small (under 100 employees) companies averaged \$1.7 million and \$367,490 respectively.³ Sample areas of expenditures include executive development, management training, interpersonal skills, information technology, customer service, sales, compliance, and onboarding.⁴

Case studies can be used as a vehicle for professionals and executives to learn about leadership when funding is limited. This research will present a case study of an exceptionally successful professional within his given field. The professional career of Coach Bob Hurley Sr. will be researched and analyzed from the Jesuit perspective known as "Heroic Leadership." Coach Hurley, who was Jesuit educated, had unprecedented success as the coach of St. Anthony's High School Boys' Varsity Basketball Team in Jersey City, New Jersey.

St. Anthony's High School was a co-educational college preparatory school operated by the Catholic Archdiocese of Newark. As an independent school that received no funding by the Catholic Church, St. Anthony's mission was to take "the most economically challenged young adults from in and around Jersey City and teach them that they have the character, talent, wisdom and intellect to become valuable, contributing members of their community."⁵

It should be noted that the genesis of this research is rooted in this author's deep respect and admiration for Coach Hurley not only with his success on the basketball court but also with his impact on this small Catholic high school in Jersey City, New Jersey. With a bold mission and a considerable lack of resources, Coach Hurley had a track record of success that should be researched and understood by all professionals including executives. The goal of this study was to examine Coach Hurley's life and career and to determine if in fact he was a "Heroic Leader."

Success as a Basketball Coach

Coach Hurley is considered one of the top high school basketball coaches of all time. In his forty-five years (1973-2017) as the Head Boys' Varsity

Basketball Coach at St. Anthony's High School in Jersey City, Coach Hurley's teams have generated the following athletic achievements:

- 28 New Jersey state championships;
- 13 Tournament of Champions titles;
- 4 national championships; and
- 8 undefeated seasons.⁶

In addition, Coach Hurley had a 1,185-125 win/loss record.⁷

In 2010, Coach Hurley received the highest honor within his field as he was inducted into the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame. He is one of only three high school basketball coaches to receive such an honor.⁸

St. Anthony's High School lacked resources. The high school served the urban poor of Jersey City. Its operations budget, which included teacher salaries and facilities, was modest. Tuition had to be continually discounted (i.e., scholarships) due to the financial demographic of its student population. It was not uncommon that tuition revenue did not meet expenses. Outside fundraising was required.

Overall, even with these evident constraints, Coach Hurley's teams "dominated New Jersey basketball for decades."⁹ What is all the more remarkable is that Coach Hurley was able to build a basketball dynasty out of a small Catholic high school operated by the Felician Sisters with fewer than 200 students enrolled and without a true gymnasium.¹⁰

In 2014, Coach Hurley also became the President of St. Anthony's High School.¹¹ He continued to serve as president (pro bono) and basketball coach until 2017 when St. Anthony's ultimately closed due to lack of enrollment and financial hardship.¹²

Methodology

A historical study of the career of Coach Hurley was conducted. This included a comprehensive review of the traditional media coverage Coach Hurley received as the successful coach of the St. Anthony's High School Boys' Varsity Basketball Team. It also included the traditional media coverage Coach Hurley received as President of

St. Anthony's High School during its struggles to remain open.

In addition, the methodology also included one-on-one phone interviews between Coach Hurley and Francis Petit (the author) in July 2020. Phone interviews were conducted due to the timing of the COVID-19 pandemic with the purpose to collect data on the methods in which Coach Hurley managed and led his teams and institution. Upon the completion of this qualitative research, key takeaways were then applied and measured against the Four Pillars of Success within Chris Lowney's *Heroic Leadership*. Each pillar was subsequently a focus within the phone interviews with Coach Hurley. This allowed for the application of the Four Pillars of Success within Coach Hurley's professional career. Conclusions were then determined on whether Coach Hurley successfully integrated these four essential pillars of Self-Awareness, Ingenuity, Love and Heroism within his life's work at St. Anthony's High School.

What is Heroic Leadership?

Heroic leadership research was developed by Chris Lowney.¹³ Lowney is a former Jesuit seminarian and Managing Director at J.P. Morgan and now is a best-selling and award-winning author whose works include books and articles featured in *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *Fast Company* and *The Wall Street Journal*.

The Heroic Leadership concept was developed after researching the Society of Jesus, which is a religious order known as the Jesuits, that was founded in 1540 by St. Ignatius of Loyola and his followers.¹⁴ Within his research, Lowney determined that Jesuits, throughout their 450+ year history, continually exhibited four unique values listed below that "created their leadership substance":

- Self-Awareness
- Ingenuity
- Love
- Heroism¹⁵

This four-pillared approach, which starts with *Self-Awareness*, has not only been a characteristic of Jesuit leadership but has also, according to

Lowney, anchored the success of an organization. Throughout his research, Lowney describes each pillar and provides examples of how the Jesuits lived these four values.

In terms of Self-Awareness, Lowney highlights the *Examen*, a reflection from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola, as the key tool that leads to one's foundation of Self-Awareness.¹⁶ Lowney has stated that "Effective leaders understand their own strengths, weaknesses, and values in a profound way; and have a daily mechanism for monitoring what's going on."¹⁷

In terms of *Ingenuity*, Lowney discusses how Jesuit ingenuity requires a freedom of "prejudices, attachments, fears and narrowmindedness" that can allow for new ideas, opportunities and solutions to emerge.¹⁸

With *Love* driven leadership, Lowney indicates that this allows the ability to unlock the potential in others and having the vision to see and appreciate each person's talent, potential and dignity.

In terms of *Heroism*, Lowney states that heroes "extract gold from the opportunities at hand" with a goal of eliciting great desires with "heroic objectives."¹⁹ Lowney has further stated that "Above all, the heroic leader is willing to devote him or herself to a mission and purpose greater than his or her own ego and self-advancement."²⁰

Coach Hurley has been recognized and acclaimed by the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall of Fame as an effective, successful and almost legendary leader in the high school coaching profession. The Four Pillars gives one approach to explore, analyze and articulate some of the specific qualities that may have accounted for Coach Hurley's leadership success.

Biography of Coach Hurley

Coach Hurley was born on July 31, 1947 in Jersey City, New Jersey. Born as the oldest of four children, Coach Hurley's parents played a critical role in his life. Upon graduating St. Paul's (Catholic) Grammar School in the Greenville section of Jersey City, Coach Hurley then attended Saint Peter's Preparatory School (Saint Peter's Prep) which is all-male Jesuit secondary school in

Jersey City. At Saint Peter's Prep, Coach Hurley was a member of the basketball team.²¹

Upon graduating Saint Peter's Prep in 1965, Coach Hurley then attended Saint Peter's College also located in Jersey City. As the first member of his family to ever attend college, Coach Hurley indicated that going away for school was "not an option." During his first year at Saint Peter's College, Coach Hurley played on the Freshman Basketball Team but was cut from the college team his sophomore year to make room for the scholarship players.²²

As a result, he began his coaching career at the Catholic Youth Organization level at his home parish of St. Paul's. Soon after, Mr. John Ryan, the Head Varsity Basketball Coach of St. Anthony's High School, hired Hurley as the Freshman Coach. Hurley would be the Freshman Coach for two years and then the Junior Varsity Coach for three years before becoming the Head Varsity Coach of St. Anthony's in 1972.²³

Throughout this period, life was uncertain for Coach Hurley. He was finishing up his undergraduate degree at night at Saint Peter's College. The Vietnam War had escalated and there was a possibility of being drafted. He had many odd jobs at the time including substitute teaching and bartending. Coach Hurley indicated that if the Board of Education was hiring he would have seriously considered taking a position, but one never came up. In 1972, at the suggestion of his father, who was his mentor, Coach Hurley secured a job within the Probation Department in Jersey City.²⁴

As a probation officer, Coach Hurley learned many key lessons that had a direct impact on his work at St. Anthony's High School. His goal, as a probation officer, was to not have these individuals incarcerated again, and it was therefore "hard to see them go back to jail." He wanted to help these individuals although many were already "tainted" by their incarceration experience. Through his home visits he found that he had developed an empathy for the family members although he realized that this could have easily happened to either himself or his siblings.²⁵

Perhaps the most critical lesson that Coach Hurley learned in his work as a probation officer was that things started to go awry within the lives of these parolees in the seventh and eighth grades. It was at this time (ages 12–14) that these parolees made “bad decisions” that steered them off course.²⁶

Coach Hurley’s work as a probation officer not only allowed him to learn the “world of his players” in Jersey City but also understand their households. It also made him realize the importance for his players to stay in school and attend college especially outside of Jersey City. This would allow for the players to not only develop a productive future but to also allow for a new perspective of Jersey City if they attended college outside the city.

Life as a probation officer would also have other advantages for Coach Hurley. The work schedule was less shift oriented as compared to the Jersey City Police and Fire Departments and allowed him the ability to simultaneously coach basketball at St. Anthony’s.²⁷ In addition, Coach Hurley also realized that coaching basketball would never be lucrative for him as he never earned more than \$9,000 (when he accepted a salary) at any given time at St. Anthony’s.²⁸

Coach Hurley began a professional journey in which he would be a probation officer and also a part time basketball coach at St. Anthony’s High School. It was through this dual role that he could not only pursue his passion for basketball but also positively impact his unique population of players on and off the court.

Self-Awareness Revisited

Self-awareness is the foundation of Heroic Leadership. The self-awareness process, as exhibited by the early Jesuits, allows one to discover who they are, what they stand for and what they should pursue. More specifically, the journey of self-awareness allows one to (1) appreciate oneself as talented; (2) identify personal and derailing baggage; (3) develop goals and ambitions; (4) determine what one stands for; (5) develop a worldwide view; and (6) acquire a habit of updating oneself regularly.²⁹

Coach Hurley understood his role in life and that coaching St. Anthony’s was “his destiny.” It appears that he was certainly self-aware. Coach Hurley understood that this was what he was supposed to be doing as it combined his love for basketball and his ability to positively impact his players at such a critical time in their lives.³⁰ For better or worse, he knew that if he stopped coaching at St. Anthony’s it may lead to the school’s closure. If that were to occur he knew Jersey City would not be able to replace such an institution.³¹

As the Jesuits were called to be “Contemplatives in Action” for the Greater Glory of God, Coach Hurley also followed this mandate with his life’s work.

As a result of his work as a probation officer, Coach Hurley knew the impact he could potentially have on the lives of his players. He was very effective in bringing out their full potential.³² He also took pride in developing the whole person.³³ This inevitably led his players to pursue college and lead productive lives.

On a more granular level, Coach Hurley knew early on that his “level of intensity” as a coach and mentor would work well within St. Anthony’s and the Jersey City environment. Coach Hurley has referred to himself as a “Benevolent Dictator.”³⁴ He felt that his style would “resonate and be effective” at St. Anthony’s and would not be well received in other settings. The reason why Coach Hurley felt this way was that he believed his players desired and needed the structure and discipline he was providing as it was not necessarily present within their homes.³⁵

In addition, Coach Hurley realized he would have been a “terrible college recruiter” if he was a collegiate basketball coach. Coach Hurley understood that he would have been “too honest” with these college recruits and would have told them all of their shortcomings. He would not have lied to them and told them what they would want to hear to convince them to attend his institution.³⁶

Furthermore, Coach Hurley also believed that he would have been “bad” with dealing with parents. As the basketball coach at St. Anthony’s,

the parents were not “hands on.” Coach Hurley worked directly with his players and “rarely dealt with parents.” Coach Hurley understood that this would not have been one of his strengths.³⁷

Coach Hurley also understood that he was not good at asking for anything. As the President of St. Anthony’s, one of his strengths was not asking for donations. Coach Hurley would present the case and the development officer would make the monetary ask. Coach Hurley felt that if he asked for a gift (i.e., monetary donation) he would have to give back to the donor double what was given.³⁸ He knew that this was not his strength and he indicated that it stemmed from the way he was raised.³⁹

Interestingly, Coach Hurley received interest from many colleges about potential coaching opportunities. He in fact only considered leaving St. Anthony’s twice during his long and successful association with this institution.

In 1985, Coach Hurley was offered an assistant coaching position on Pete Gillen’s staff at Xavier University. Coach Hurley and his wife, Chris, flew to Cincinnati (where Xavier is located), began searching for real estate and were ready to make this professional move.⁴⁰ When Coach and Mrs. Hurley arrived home from Cincinnati, their two sons, Bobby and Danny, were very much against the move for the following reasons:

Most kids would be in favor of their dad earning a pay raise, a promotion and moving into a bigger house. But my brother, Bobby, and I were crushed. We were in junior high, and all we’d ever wanted was to play for our dad at St. Anthony. We didn’t have babysitters growing up—we took the No. 81 or 9 bus to White Eagle Hall and hung out at Dad’s practices.⁴¹

Upon hearing the feedback from his sons, Coach Hurley decided to not accept the position at Xavier.

The second time Coach Hurley considered leaving St. Anthony’s was for the head coaching position at Monmouth University in New Jersey. At the time, both Coach Hurley’s sons had graduated college and they would have been his assistant

coaches if in fact he took the position. In the end, Coach Hurley decided not to pursue the Monmouth coaching position. He decided to stay at St. Anthony’s High School as he knew his players, was comfortable with them, and more importantly, saw potential in them. He was also worried that if he left St. Anthony’s his coaching replacement would not have “finished the job” and do the “extra things” for his players that he did including arranging tutoring programs, teaching social skills (i.e., firm handshakes) and also building their enthusiasm which always impressed college recruiters.⁴²

Coach Hurley answered the Jesuits’ call of “Men and Women for Others” at St. Anthony’s High School. Coach Hurley realized that coaching St. Anthony’s High School was his destiny. He also realized that “it never felt it was a promotion to be a college coach.”⁴³

Love Revisited

Love is a unifying, motivating and energizing force for any organization. Love allows leaders to be more open to a colleague’s potential, talent and dignity. Love also gives a leader the courage, passion and commitment to “unlock that potential” in others, which can often times require difficult conversations. Love also creates loyalty, support and unites organizations.⁴⁴

Saint Ignatius of Loyola believed that love coupled with modesty and charity were key components in how one should lead. Coach Hurley certainly displayed love throughout his career at St. Anthony’s High School. First, Coach Hurley truly cared about his players. He was not only a coach but also a “father figure” to many.⁴⁵ In some ways he was “over protective” and “gave them rules.”⁴⁶ Players were required to sign a contract prior to the season on how to conduct themselves. The rules, for example, included short hair, no tattoos, no earrings and an enforced evening curfew. The contract was designed to guide the players to make correct decisions.⁴⁷ The exercise also reinforced to the players to “always be careful” within their surroundings and the streets of Jersey City and use caution. In addition, Coach Hurley taught his players that in order to be successful one must “give up things for the team.”⁴⁸ Coach Hurley, in essence, gave up a

potentially lucrative career in coaching basketball at a higher level in order to help the less fortunate of Jersey City.

Coach Hurley illustrated love to his players and the St. Anthony's basketball program by the symbolic gesture of "sweeping the floor" of the gymnasium prior to each home game. Coach Hurley has stated that "Nobody sweeps the floor better than me."⁴⁹ The symbolic gesture was not just about illustrating love and servant leadership. Coach Hurley was aware of its much bigger impact.

For example, Coach Hurley believed that one should always leave the gym in "better shape than you found it."⁵⁰ Such a philosophy paid dividends that benefited St. Anthony's. More specifically, it allowed for a wonderful relationship with the custodians. This relationship allowed for additional gymnasium time beyond the rental contract. Coach Hurley mentioned an example where if the gym rental was from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m. on a Saturday, the custodian would arrive at 8 a.m. and subsequently allowed the team to start practicing by 8:15 a.m.

Understanding the importance the custodian would have on his team's ability to secure additional gym time at no additional fee, Coach Hurley invited the custodian(s) to travel with St. Anthony's for national tournaments and they even received team jackets.⁵¹ By treating the custodians with "dignity" Coach Hurley energized them and created loyalty, love and support for his teams.

St. Ignatius of Loyola had preached to his followers to not only find God in all things but to also share your gifts of love to all. Coach Hurley certainly followed this example by sharing his wife who acted as the official "scorekeeper" and unofficial "mom" for many years. More specifically, Mrs. Hurley was "always involved in the program" and gave of herself for the program. Coach Hurley believed that it was important for his players to see the relationship he had with his wife as many of his players did not come from the "traditional home environment."⁵²

At times, Coach Hurley would not only take care of sick players but would also take in temporarily displaced players. He encouraged his players to go

to church. Coach Hurley always taught each player to be a good person, a good student and a good basketball player. The first two items would carry them for life.⁵³

Another act of love was what Coach Hurley called "The Hanging Out Rule." Coach Hurley would drive around Jersey City looking to see if his players were "hanging out" and "leaning against apartment buildings." He felt that if his players are not going anywhere it is a "waste of time" and bad things would happen if they did not obey "The Hanging Out Rule." He was also making sure that his players were not violating the team curfew.⁵⁴ Mr. Jerry Walker, a 1989 graduate of St. Anthony's and a former member of the Seton Hall University Men's Basketball Team, further reinforced Coach Hurley's efforts on the streets of Jersey City on behalf of his players.⁵⁵

Lastly, Coach Hurley was grateful and appreciated the love that Sister Mary Alan Barszczewski (Sr. Alan) gave to his players and to St. Anthony's. Sr. Alan had multiple roles at St. Anthony's over the years including Athletic Director and Principal. A "tough Philadelphia woman" who was educated at Villanova, Sister Alan was also a fundraiser who enabled St. Anthony's to remain open as long as it did. Sr. Alan passed away in 2009 at the young age of 62. Coach Hurley admired her work and the love she gave to St. Anthony's.⁶⁸ While Coach Hurley had already displayed love to St. Anthony's throughout his career he certainly continued Sr. Alan's legacy of love within his work as Coach and President of the institution.

Heroism Revisited

The Jesuits have characterized heroic deeds within leadership as *Magis*, which is the Jesuit "company logo" that illustrates a "restless drive to look for something more in every opportunity and the confidence that one will find it."⁶⁹ Heroism is about a leader who seeks something more and something greater.

According to *Heroic Leadership*, Saint Ignatius of Loyola always spoke to his Jesuit brothers about their great obligation to those less fortunate and to aim high in order to make positive change.⁵⁶ This can be seen on how the early Jesuits proceeded to successfully open up schools and evangelize on a

global scale. Coach Hurley seemed to have followed this creed throughout his work at St. Anthony's.

Coach Hurley made it his mission to keep St. Anthony's open.⁵⁷ As stated earlier, he did not accept an honorarium when he took on the position of President. When St. Anthony's closed in 2017, he worked hard to place his students in other local Catholic schools along with his teachers and administration. Coach Hurley was able to successfully place one of his colleagues in the position of Assistant Principal at the Fordham Preparatory School in the Bronx.⁵⁸

As a probation officer, Coach Hurley realized that things could start to go wrong at ages 12 through 14 with the pre-incarcerated population. Upon this realization, Coach Hurley believed that he could positively impact his players beyond basketball.⁵⁹ He realized that his work at St. Anthony's could prevent his players from being "swallowed by society."⁶⁰

As Saint Ignatius of Loyola encouraged his followers to extend themselves and to grasp for something within reach, Coach Hurley did much of the same with his players. Coach Hurley's goal was to have his basketball players accepted to and attend college, preferably outside of Jersey City. He developed this strategy early on from his counterpart, the late Morgan Wootten, who was the basketball coach at DeMatha Catholic High School in Hyattsville, Maryland. A high percentage of Coach Wootten's players received athletic basketball scholarships to college because his teams were so successful. Coach Hurley indicated that Coach Wootten had "an unbelievable track record for basketball scholarships for his players."⁶¹

Coach Hurley realized that he did not have many top players, at the time, who would receive athletic scholarships for basketball. However, his players could receive a high level of financial aid given their familial financial positions. Coach Hurley realized that the overall financial aid package coupled with the Pell Grants would make it possible for his players to attend a New Jersey public institution like Montclair State University. He thus began to move forward with this strategy to place his students in college.⁶²

1984 marked a turning point for St. Anthony's. Mr. David Rivers, who graduated St. Anthony's in 1984 and who was one of its stars, attended Notre Dame on a basketball scholarship. After the David Rivers era, St. Anthony's was able to secure top high school basketball players which led to college basketball scholarships in addition to need-based financial aid.⁶³

Coach Hurley's track record with getting his players accepted to college has been outstanding. Since 1992, 100% of Coach Hurley's players have been accepted to college.⁶⁴ That accomplishment is something of which Coach Hurley is most proud.⁶⁵

With a continued relentless pursuit, as St. Ignatius of Loyola preached, to pursue goals that are greater than oneself, Coach Hurley did much of the same, even after coaching at Saint Anthony's. When Saint Anthony's closed in 2017, Coach Hurley was offered many coaching opportunities. He did not think it was fair to take another coaching position as he could not "recreate" what was achieved at St. Anthony's.⁶⁶ He also knew he was not ready to just stay home and spend his time reading.⁶⁷ Coach Hurley therefore bypassed those opportunities to spend more time with his grandchildren and to also launch and operate the Hurley Family Foundation, which offers free basketball clinics and socialization skills education to Jersey City children from third to twelfth grade.⁶⁸ Instead of being a "Benevolent Dictator" Coach Hurley now teaches the children in a "grandfatherly way." Results of fundraising are much less than what was required to keep St. Anthony's open and includes items such as gym rentals, insurance, reversible shirts, jump ropes and sponsorship to summer campus. Similar to his work at St. Anthony's, Coach Hurley's ultimate goal is to get these children to college.⁶⁹

Overall, Coach Hurley's impact on the students at St. Anthony's and the children of Jersey City have been nothing but Heroic.

Ingenuity Revisited

Ingenuity is the ability to free oneself from any bias or negative sentiment in order to take on a full-hearted pursuit for an opportunity that

matters. Ingenuity enables individuals to “live outside the box.” Often times ingenuity requires working on a problem “without a script” and developing imaginative solutions for positive momentum.⁷⁰

The early Jesuits, upon Saint Ignatius of Loyola’s directive, traveled all over the globe to not only evangelize, open schools and recruit new Jesuits but to also be “Men for Others.” In order to be successful, creativity, flexibility and agility were required. Coach Hurley has certainly demonstrated ingenuity throughout his career at St. Anthony’s.

As a young high school coach at St. Anthony’s, Coach Hurley began to attend the Five Star Basketball Camps. Coach Hurley indicated that Mr. Howard Garfinkel, who managed the camps at the time, had a “huge influence” on him. Coach Hurley attended his first Five Star Camp in 1974 in Pennsylvania. From that experience he found out “how little he knows” as he was surrounded by “great coaches” on the high school and college level. He then continued to attend these camps for the next ten years. At the conclusion of each camp, Coach Hurley brought back this new knowledge to St. Anthony’s. He also used the contacts he had made at these camps with college coaches to assist his players with recruitment. In essence, these camps molded Coach Hurley into being a “lifelong learner.”⁷¹

In addition, in terms of ingenuity, Coach Hurley indicated he had kept “raising the bar” with his team. In the early 1970s, St. Anthony’s competed in a lower-level division and became the “C Champs” during the 1973-1974 season. St. Anthony’s subsequently set their goals higher and wanted to become competitive within the Tournament of Champions, which is where private and public schools compete together within New Jersey. St. Anthony’s became so successful within this higher level that they now have the most championships compared to any other high school in New Jersey within the Tournament of Champions. This would have never occurred if Coach Hurley did not have the vision of “raising the bar” and goals for the St. Anthony’s Program. His teams were not only competitive on the court but they were respectful to the referee and to their opponent. Coach

Hurley indicated that their style of play “made it impossible for anyone not to like us.” Furthermore, like the Jesuits who immerse themselves within their communities to gain a greater understanding, Coach Hurley did much of the same to “connect with his players.” For example, after a practice or game, Coach Hurley would drive some of his players to their homes in Jersey City. In the car he would either play “oldies music” on the radio or talk to his players about current issues. This dialogue allowed Coach Hurley to not only hear the feedback of his players, within an informal setting, but it also allowed him to have a “greater understanding of his players” which inevitably, he believes, helped him as a coach.⁷²

In addition, Coach Hurley displayed *ingenuity* through an unofficial mentoring process that he developed. More specifically, his former players and graduates of St. Anthony’s would always come back to the high school practices during college breaks to visit and practice with his current players. Before or after these practices, current players would first witness how the relationship with Coach Hurley and his former players evolved. He was no longer the “Benevolent Dictator” to them but rather a mentor, friend and endearing figure. They would talk to Coach Hurley “about everything.” Secondly, these alumni would also speak to the current players, give them guidance and discuss how much they liked college. In essence, these “touch points” with the alumni allowed these current players to develop goals about college and also hope that higher education was a reality. While this unofficial mentoring process faded by the 2010 season due to the increased required travel for AAU Basketball, etc., Coach Hurley indicated that such a process had a profound impact on his players.⁷³

Overall, Coach Hurley had an inner openness to innovating and re-writing the “coaching playbook” in order to attain his goals. Throughout the other pillars, many of the simple actions that Coach Hurley demonstrated (i.e., sweeping the floor, driving around the neighborhood, etc.) are examples of activities that are not the normal, regular and expected things that coaches learn to do. Rather, Coach Hurley kept innovating his approaches to achieve his goals. He did not follow the status quo on “how to coach.” Alternatively,

he rewrote the handbook for being a dedicated coach and in the end, it worked for him.

Like the Jesuits, Coach Hurley not only thought outside the box but also lived outside the box with his innovative and creative solutions at St. Anthony's High School.

Concluding Remarks

It is important to note that research on a figure such as Coach Hurley is generalizable and can provide opportunities for leaders in other organizations and settings.

First, Coach Hurley is a testament that a high level of success can be achieved with few resources. St. Anthony's High School served the urban poor of Jersey City. Large budgets and top facilities (including athletic facilities) were not available. Due to its lack of resources and funding, St. Anthony's High School did not even own its own gymnasium. Yet Coach Hurley found a way to overcome these obstacles with creative solutions and build an elite high school basketball program.

Second, Coach Hurley had a full understanding of himself and his surroundings. He knew full well that his leadership style of being a "benevolent dictator" would not resonate in other work environments but would be effective at St. Anthony's High School. He was therefore able to align his leadership style to the most effective

work setting. In addition, Coach Hurley loved not only his job but also the institution of St. Anthony's High School along with its stakeholders. This love dictated his actions which were often times heroic.

Leaders from other industries should take note. Aligning one's professional leadership style to the right environment coupled with the ability to implement creative solutions along with a powerful love for one's institution can lead to not only heroic actions but also success no matter one's role or industry. Coach Hurley utilized an integrated approach to his work at St. Anthony's High School. His success resulted due to the interdependency of the Four Pillars of Heroic Leadership. For example, if Coach Hurley's *Self-Awareness* was not coupled with *Love* he may not have extended himself as such. If Coach Hurley's *Ingenuity* was not coupled with *Heroism* his actions may have been different. Overall, Coach Hurley's integrated approach of the Four Pillars was a big reason for his success. His approach, in the composite, defined how Coach Hurley approached his work and life revolving around St. Anthony's High School.⁷⁴

In closing, Coach Hurley was also grateful. Upon reflecting on his career, Coach Hurley indicated "I've definitely gotten more from this game than I could ever have given it." He stated that in retrospect, "it was my bliss."⁷⁵ HJE

Notes

¹ 2019 Training Industry Report, *Training*, November 6, 2019, https://trainingmag.com/sites/default/files/2019_industry_report.pdf.

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